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MANAGEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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A summary of significant events of
interest to USDA management

ISSUE #58
APRIL 4, 1977

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY NOMINATIONS.....On March 24 the Senate confirmed the nomination of Carol Tucker Foreman to be an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture and a member of the Board of Directors of the CCC. Mrs. Foreman was sworn in at a ceremony in the White House on March 25. The Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry has scheduled April 6 hearings on the nominations of M. Rupert Cutler, Robert H. Meyer, Alex Mercure, and Dale E. Hathaway to be Assistant Secretaries of Agriculture and CCC Board members and that of John White and Howard Hjort to be CCC Board members. (Contact: Phyllis Mowery, OP, ext. 77131)

PHYSICAL SECURITY - HANDICAPPED EMPLOYEE FACILITIES.....Two cardkey operated doors for USDA handicapped employees are under construction in the South Building. The facilities are located on the C Street side of the building in Wing 6, opening into Court 5, and in Wing 3, opening into Court 2. These doors should be operational in April. A door for handicapped employees is now in operation in the Administration Building. The cardkeys are not interchangeable between the Administration and South Buildings.

USDA handicapped employees should contact Patricia J. Killen, OP, extension 75625, for information about the use of these facilities and to obtain a cardkey to operate the doors.

CONTRACT COMPLIANCE DIVISION TRANSFER.....The functions of the Contract Compliance Division (CCD), Office of Equal Opportunity will be transferred to the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), Department of Defense effective October 1. Many employees of CCD are unable or do not wish to transfer to DLA's widely dispersed field locations. We are asking USDA Agencies for placement assistance for those CCD employees who will be unable to transfer to DLA.

Mr. John J. Sullivan, Jr., Chief, Personnel Operations Division, Office of Personnel, may be contacted on extension 75781 for the names, and backgrounds of CCD employees wishing to explore employment opportunities within USDA.

CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE.....Much effort has gone into a new draft of FNS Instruction 113-1, "Implementation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964". This instruction, when issued, will fully implement new Department of Justice requirements for pre-award and post-approval compliance reviews and coordination of review responsibilities with other Federal agencies. Other agencies in USDA with Title VI programs are expected to follow a similar process of revising and strengthening their Civil Rights compliance review instructions. At the Department level, OEO specialists will continue to coordinate and assist the agencies in this important endeavor. Those agencies desiring a copy of the FNS instruction to aid them in their developmental effort should contact Earl Hunnigan. (Contact: R. J. Peer, OEO, ext. 77327)

NATIONAL FINANCE CENTER NEWS.....

- ...Domestic Travel Vouchers - A memorandum was mailed on March 18 to Fiscal Officers and Deputy Administrators for Management pointing out errors in domestic travel vouchers. Increased emphasis is required by agency personnel to ensure that travel vouchers are properly prepared.
- ...Central Accounting System - Agencies have been improving the quality of input documents, however, additional improvement is needed in the inputting of period end estimates. A skeletal version of the property subsystems should be in operation by October 1977. No additional agencies will be added to the system until October 1978. Development and implementation of the system will be significantly impacted by the upcoming hardware conversion and the payroll conversion.

CENTRAL ANSWERING UNIT.....The Central Answering Unit has been temporarily phased out pending organizational reassessment and a determination of future Secretarial correspondence needs.

Although some difficulty was experienced at the outset, it was soon recognized by several agencies that they could be relieved of a considerable portion of their routine correspondence by working with the Central Answering Unit.

This unit has proven its value. Plans are being developed to reevaluate the correspondence workload within the Department and take another look at ways to improve the operation. Future changes in procedures will be discussed with the Management Council. (Contact: Maryann Ferko, SEC, ext. 73291)

COTTON ANNEX RENOVATION.....GSA plans to begin renovation of the Cotton Annex warehouse space on April 1. Completion of the 13,500 square feet of office space is anticipated for October; however, no decision has been made on space allocation to agencies. (Contact: Bill Hamilton, 00, ext. 73141)

ELIMINATION OF ADP/MIS ERRORS.....ADS has made significant progress in eliminating master file errors in the inventory of USDA computer equipment maintained by GSA. This error rate has been reduced from 24% in February 1976 to 0.3%. Significant assistance from USDA agencies made this possible. (Contact: J. Erb, ADS, ext. 72803)

ADP POLICY ADVISORY BOARD MEETING DATE CHANGED.....Because numerous members of the ADP Policy Advisory Board were unable to attend the last scheduled meeting, the briefing on Phase 1 of Network Analysis Corporation's Telecommunications study has been postponed to April 21 in Room 3524-S. (Contact: H. Meetze, ADS, ext. 76275)

FCCC COST AVOIDANCE IN COMPUTER PERIPHERALS.....As a result of recompetition for peripheral devices on the installed Univac 1100/42 computer at Fort Collins, the Fort Collins Computer Center will realize an annualized cost avoidance of \$343,000. (Contact: R. Long, ADS, ext. 74789)

GSA LEASING PROGRAM.....The freeze on acquiring leased space for 120 days deferred enough expenditures to carry GSA through the balance of FY 77. GSA is now taking action on FY 76 requests for space and on requests submitted this fiscal year. The only delays now being encountered are due to the usual disagreements over location and scope of a facility, or because of the backlog of requests caused by the freeze. The experience of the last few years indicates that another temporary freeze can be anticipated at the beginning of FY 78. (Contact: James E. Wood, 00, ext. 75225)

PRIVACY ACT/FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT.....The Civil Service Commission has issued guidance on the interface between the Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information Act and how they affect the field of labor management in nine specific areas. This guidance is contained in FPM Letter 711-126, December 30, 1976. (Contact: Bill Riley, OP, ext. 77654)

FNS MAIL MANAGEMENT.....FNS has found a way to save \$447,000 on postage costs on a mailing of 260,000 pieces. The contemplated first class mailing would have cost \$478,400 due to the size of the envelope and the weight. A program specialist recommended taking advantage of the FNS bulk-rate permit resulting in third-class mailing costs of \$31,000. The additional bulk handling preparation was provided at minimal cost by a contractor. (Contact: Frank Gearde, FNS, ext. 78974)

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS.....There is some evidence to support the need for agencies to closely monitor some of the disciplinary actions taken against employees. Records indicate that actions have been taken, or have been escalated, to a point out of proportion to the offense.

In a recent case, an employee was given a letter of reprimand for violating a newly established office procedure. The employee, believing the action to be unreasonable, and an act of reprisal, filed a complaint. An inquiry was made, and the Department spent several thousand dollars to investigate, review and decide that the letter of reprimand could and should have been avoided. A simple inquiry on the part of the supervisor who issued the reprimand would have established the lack of merit in this case. (Contact: Lawrence Cavallero, OP, ext. 77467)

FLEXITIME IN ERS.....Since January 31, ERS Washington office employees have been participating in a trial implementation of flexitour, a modified flexitime program that permits employees to preselect their work hours. Current feedback indicates that flexitour has no negative impact on work performance and has been well received by employees. The main complaint has been from members of interagency carpools who have not been able to take full advantage of flexitour since other carpool members are restricted to the regular work hours.

ERS will survey Washington office employees in mid-April to obtain their comments regarding flexitour. If there is overwhelming criticism of the program at that time, it will be terminated. Otherwise, it will continue through July as planned. (Contact: Allan Johnson, ERS, ext. 78066)

MINORITY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE..... In November 1976, AMS awarded its first 8(a) commodity procurement contract to a minority business enterprise. This pilot project was worked out with the help of OEO and the Small Business Administration. This pilot project has ended with AMS having purchased 539,000 pounds of frozen ground beef for a total of \$373,558. These purchases under the National School Lunch Act, the Older Americans Act and the Agriculture and Consumers Protection Act will be expanded to include other commodities. (Contact: Robert Brown, AMS, ext. 73817)

SCS PROVIDES EMPLOYEE CONDUCT TRAINING..... Personnel Bulletin 410-290 dated October 10, 1975, directed agencies to provide training for employees in Employee Responsibilities, Ethics and Conduct. Approximately 80 percent of SCS's 13,200 employees have received training since last summer and the remaining employees will receive the training soon. The training has been well received and participants felt it was very beneficial. (Contact: Verne Bathurst, SCS, ext. 76297)

FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION STUDENTS..... Thirty-three Federal agencies employed some 9,000 cooperative education students during FY 1976. The student figure was an all-time high and represented an increase of 23% over FY 1975. Sixty-eight percent of the co-op assignments were in 3 occupational groups - Engineering and Architecture (3,188), General Administration (1,062), and Accounting and Budget (1,825). These co-op students represent 538 campuses in 50 States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

USDA employees 245 co-op students in 11 occupational groups including biological sciences, physical sciences, engineering and architecture, accounting and budgeting, etc. Among the values cited for the program are:

- ...The chance to review work performance of students before selecting them for entry-level positions.
- ...The help the program affords as a viable and cost-effective tool in recruiting for hard-to-fill positions-especially in engineering and accounting.
- ...The feed-in of new findings and theories from the educational environment.
- ...The encouragement of women to try jobs usually held by men.
- ...The effectiveness of co-op in the recruitment of minority candidates.
- ...The relatively low cost and high effectiveness of training co-op students as compared with that of training newly employed graduates at higher grade levels.

The Department Coordinator and individual Agency Coordinators can provide information and assistance on the program. (Contact: Patricia Killen, OP, ext. 72435)

AMS EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM..... Fourteen employees, GS-13-15, have been selected to participate in a development program of up to 24 months. Thirty-five applicants from field locations and headquarters had applied for these positions and agreed to mobility assignments. This program includes group and individual training at outside institutions and self-study programs. The goal is to develop improved internal management resources. (Contact: Charles Wakefield, AMS, ext. 76235)